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2009 Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl - An Overall View

By Troy Phillips, www.armedforcesbowl.com

Fort Worth, Texas, December 31, 2009 - Considering a cold front, frigid light rain and overcast skies moved into the North Texas region early Thursday afternoon, the seventh **Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl** could have been awash in empty seats.

That didn't happen, as Air Force (8-5) picked up its first bowl victory since 2000 with a 47-20 victory over Houston (10-4) in a rematch of last year's BHAFB. Air Force avenged last year's loss to the Cougars and pushed the Mountain West Conference to 4-0 in bowls with TCU waiting to finish the league's postseason in next week's Fiesta Bowl.

"As well as those guys played today, the best stuff they're going to do is what they'll do after they graduate from the United States Air Force Academy," said drink-tub drenched Air Force coach Troy Calhoun, pointing at his team as it hoisted the BHAFB championship trophy.

A crowd of 41,414 fans saw Air Force's No. 1-ranked pass defense intercept Houston quarterback Case Keenum six times and the Falcons roll up 563 total yards, including 420 rushing. The day's notable guest, Admiral Michael Mullen, U.S. Navy, swore new active-duty recruits into all branches of the military at midfield at halftime and reminded everyone why the BHAFB's mission is unique.

"It went great," BHAFB executive director Brant Ringler said. "The weather was a little unkind to us as far as cloud cover. We weren't able to get the flyovers in that we wanted, but as far as game, it was fantastic. Air Force obviously came ready to play and gave us a good game."

For the third time in seven BHAFB's, Houston brought a sea of red-clad fans and helped give the game – along with Air Force's blue-clad fans – one of its best crowds ever. Of the college football postseason's first 16 games played (not including three remaining or in progress on Thursday), the BHAFB had the sixth-highest attendance.

"Weather always plays a part," Ringler said. "You can't control it. We're happy with what we had today and expect it'll continue to grow."

Ringler pointed out that considering the bowl matched two teams from the previous year, the weather and the current economy, the crowd was a good one.

"You can look at other bowls our size that have the same size stadium, and their numbers are down," he said. "It's good to show that the community is out there supporting what we're doing."

Houston broke a long bowl-victory drought by beating Air Force in last year's BHAFB. Air Force's last bowl victory had come in the 2000 Silicon Valley Classic.

"I'm neutral, even though Air Force has been here so many times," Ringler said. "Air Force finally got its win. Keenum didn't have a great day with six interceptions, but got its bowl win last year. Everybody always says defense wins championships, and it looks like the No. 1 pass defense prevailed over (Houston's) No. 1 offense today."

Troy Phillips - Now a freelance writer based in the Fort Worth area, Troy covered various teams and beats for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for 17 years, including Texas Tech, Baylor, TCU, North Texas and small colleges. Among several bowls Troy covered (Rose, Holiday, Cotton, Texas, and Galleryfurniture.com) were the last three Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowls. He covered high schools at two smaller papers and the S-T after graduating from TCU in 1990, and covered the debut of Major League Soccer in North Texas when FC Dallas (then the Dallas Burn) arrived on the scene. For more than a decade, Troy was part of coverage teams at the region's two PGA Tour events, the HP Byron Nelson Championship and the Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial and for years was one of the S-T's backup golf writers. In 2009, he was named Sportswriter of the Year by the Lone Star Conference. He has a master's degree (1995) from the University of North Texas.

